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### **Interim Health Advisory to Faculty & Staff**

Date: August 12, 2009  
To: Faculty & School Staff  
From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH  
Re: Faculty & Staff: Guidelines For Talking to Students about H1N1 (Swine flu) Influenza

#### **Faculty and Staff: Guidelines**

- Faculty or staff with flu-like symptoms (fever and a cough or fever and a sore throat) should stay home until they are free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- Faculty and staff who appear to have an influenza-like illness at arrival or become ill during the school day should be referred to the school nurse teacher and follow school policy for sick students.
- Faculty and staff should self-monitor every morning for symptoms of influenza-like illness and stay home if sick.
- Faculty and staff should stringently follow sanitary measures to reduce the spread of influenza, including coughing or sneezing into elbows, frequently washing hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand gel if hand washing with soap and water is not possible.
- Try to maintain a reasonable distance from people who are sick.
- NOTE: It is important to remember that many suspected H1N1 cases do not end up being H1N1 Influenza; test results indicate that most suspected cases are due to other viruses, normal colds or seasonal allergies. Fever should be used as a general guideline and distinguishing factor in determining if a child should be sent home.

#### **Faculty and Staff: Guidelines for Working with Students**

- MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE: Stay home if you have flu-like symptoms (see above for symptom list.)
- Have sanitizing gel available on tables or in wall dispensers and, if possible, have kids use it several times during the period you are with them.
- If there is no gel available, give kids ample time to wash their hands in restrooms.
- Remind kids not to shake hands and not to share food, drinks, musical instruments, etc.
- Demonstrate how to cough or sneeze into one's elbow.
- Have tissues available for kids with colds or allergies and remind them to throw them out as soon as the tissue is used.
- Schools can help serve as a focus for educational activities aimed at promoting ways to reduce the spread of influenza, including hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
- If the school nurse is not available for a sick student, the teacher should follow pre-determined procedures for when a student is sick and the school nurse is not available.

*HEALTH strongly advises that you use your teaching opportunities to reinforce basic behaviors that will help contain the spread of H1N1 Influenza.*

### **Talking to Your Students about H1N1 Influenza**

Concern over H1N1 Influenza can make children anxious. Acknowledging some level of concern is appropriate and can result in people taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Teachers should reassure their students that HEALTH and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, students also need factual, age-appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and instructions on how to decrease the risk of infection and spread of the virus. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

### **Remind Students of What They *Can Do* to Decrease the Risk of Getting H1N1 Influenza:**

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for 10-15 seconds (long enough to sing the "Happy Birthday" song once). Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Cough and sneeze into their elbow, and be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Try to maintain a reasonable distance from people who are sick.
- Stay home from school if sick, and stay away from sick people until they are better.

### **Helpful Tips**

- Ask your students what they have heard about H1N1 Influenza. Answer questions openly and honestly, at a level they can understand; be concrete and avoid difficult questions.
- See talking tips at [www.nasponline.org/resources/Talking\\_With\\_Children\\_About\\_Flu\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/Talking_With_Children_About_Flu_FINAL.pdf).
- Encourage healthy behaviors, including eating and sleeping well and exercise.
- Use their questions as an opportunity to let them know what they can do to decrease the risk of getting H1N1 Influenza.

### **Keep Explanations Age-Appropriate**

- Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should balance H1N1 Influenza facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs, such as washing hands.
- Upper elementary and early middle school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if the H1N1 Influenza comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.
- Upper middle school and high school students are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of H1N1 Influenza facts (e.g., HEALTH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention websites). Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of the H1N1 Influenza. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

### **Resources**

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/key\\_facts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/key_facts.htm)
- Rhode Island Department of Health H1N1 (Swine) Flu Site: [www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/swineflu/swineflu.php](http://www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/swineflu/swineflu.php)
- WHO Swine Influenza Site: [www.who.int/en](http://www.who.int/en)
- U.S. Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov>
- The National Association of School Psychologists: <http://www.nasponline.org/>
- The National Association of School Nurses: <http://www.nasn.org/>

- The National Parent Teacher Association: <http://www.pta.org/>